

## DAISY MILLER AND THE ROMAN FEVER

L. J. BRUCE-CHWATT, M.D.

Professor of Tropical Hygiene  
 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine  
 London, England

IN his novel, *Daisy Miller: A Study*,\* Henry James' romantic heroine decided to see the Colosseum by moonlight in the company of her handsome Italian admirer, Giovanelli. Winterbourne, an Englishman, surprises the young couple:

Winterbourne came forward again, and went towards the great cross. Daisy had got up; Giovanelli lifted his hat. Winterbourne had now begun to think simply of the craziness, from a sanitary point of view, of a delicate young girl lounging away the evening in this nest of malaria. What if she *were* a clever little reprobate? that was no reason for her dying of the *perniciosa*. . . .

"I am afraid," said Winterbourne, "that you will not think Roman fever very pretty. This is the way people catch it. I wonder," he added, turning to Giovanelli, "that you, a native Roman, should countenance such a terrible indiscretion."

"Ah," said the handsome native, "for myself, I am not afraid. . . . I told the Signorina it was a grave indiscretion; but when was the Signorina ever prudent?"

"I never was sick, and I don't mean to be!" the signorina declared. "I don't look like much, but I'm healthy! I was bound to see the Colosseum by moonlight; I shouldn't have wanted to go home without that; and we have had the most beautiful time, haven't we, Mr. Giovanelli? If there has been any danger, Eugenio can give me some pills. He has got some splendid pills."

"I should advise you," said Winterbourne, "to drive home as fast as possible and take one!"

Although Daisy Miller returned home immediately after this meeting she caught the Roman fever and died of cerebral malaria within a few days. The novel, published in 1879, after Henry James' second visit

\*James, H., Jr.: *Daisy Miller: A Study*. . . . 2 vols. London, Macmillan, 1897, vol. 1, pp. 180-83.

to Italy, is a good example of the fear of "malarial miasma" that permeated all strata of Italian society at the end of the 19th century, when Sir Ronald Ross in India and Ettore Marchiafava, Pietro Bastianelli, Battista Grassi, and Amico Bignami in Italy were discovering the mystery of the transmission of the disease and formulating the concept of its control.

One may wonder whether Henry James, "the passionate pilgrim," in describing Daisy Miller's untimely end thought of the fate of his own cousin, Minny Temple, to whom he was deeply attracted and who died after a brief illness.

His early interest in medicine came from his elder brother, William James, the psychologist and pragmatic philosopher, who took an M.D. degree at Harvard and for a brief period became lecturer in anatomy and physiology.